

On a plate, chunks of cabanossi, chunks of Kraft block Cheddar and Jatz

2024

I was gustatorily surprised in a nice way. There on the menu at a local bar was an item called Starving Artist's Plate. It consisted of slices of cabanossi, cubes of cheddar cheese, green pickled olives, and Jatz biscuits. It took me back to parties I attended or gave in the late 1970s early 1980s when it was almost de rigueur to have a plate of cabanossi, cheese, and Jatz biscuits on a convenient table or on a plate handed around. The combination was also standard fare at wine bars in the 1970's.¹ Olives usually came separately with tooth picks.

It set me wondering about the back story of cabanossi. When was it first in Australia? What apart from nibbles did folk do with cabanossi? When did it first get paired with Jatz biscuits.? For that matter, what was cabanossi? What was the story of Jatz biscuits? Or cheddar cheese? As always, I turned to *Trove*, the digital repository of newspapers, magazines and journals managed by the National Library of Australia.

Cabanossi – the basics

The earliest entry I found for cabanossi was an advertisement in 1950 for Continental Smallgoods

CONTINENTAL SMALLGOODS

Cabanossi, lb 3/8

Fetter Speck for Paprika, lb 3/4

Speckwurst, lb 3/

Liverwurst, lb 2/4

Salami, lb 2/9²³

I did a mental double-take sure that *Trove* had slipped up. I tried other searches, but it stubbornly remained that 1950 was the earliest appearance. I checked on the other smallgoods⁴ in the ad for some context. Liverwurst was one of the smallgoods listed for sale in 1888 by the English Ham Shop⁵. The earliest reference for salami I found was in 1939 in a peculiar court case where Antonio Ravesi was fined for having 'unlawfully exposed for sale meat not slaughtered at the Abattoirs, namely 12 lb. of salami'⁶. I found no references for fetter speck and the earliest reference to speck of any kind was in 1950 when bacon speck was advertised by 'a Gawler (South Australia) small goods shop to assist New Australians from the Willaston Hostel⁷ overcome the difficulty of getting the goods they ask for'.⁸ This was the first reference for speckwurst.

So, what is cabanossi?

¹ 'In the 1970s, the wine bar began to develop in competition with the pub. It was seen as an alternative, more sophisticated venue where young men and women could socialise together in an atmosphere more accepting and respectful of women.' Ross Fitzgerald and Trevor L. Jordan, *Under the Influence. A history of alcohol in Australia* ABC Books 2009 p.137

² 'Continental Smallgoods' *Daily Advertiser* 24 August 1950 p.3

³ The price is given in shillings and pence - this was pre-decimal Australia.

⁴ I will use the terminology of the time for cabanossi and its cohort in this article.

⁵ The English Ham Shop, *Evening News* 1 August 1888 p.1

⁶ 'Fined for Exposing Salami for Sale,' *The Advertiser* 29 July 1939 p.27

⁷ It looks like the hotel was being used for temporary accommodation for migrants no doubt coming to Australia under the migration scheme in post World War 2 Australia. For further on this see '*True to the Land. A history of food in Australia*' Reaktion 2021 p.154.

⁸ 'Kalte Fleischwaren' *Bunyip* 2 April 1950 p.1

Cabanossi is a traditional snack sausage which is a type of a long and thin dry meat stick. It is a cured, smoked, cooked in water and dried sausage. Due to drying the surface of the sausage is wrinkled and the color dark red-brown, typical of cured, smoked and dried meats. The flavor is strong and spicy.⁹

Cabanossi's thinness cannot be undervalued. It was so much easier to handle with or without a toothpick and, as we will come to see, the perfect size to accompany Jatz biscuits.

Cabanossi was suggested as 'good used as the meat on kabobs or to serve with drinks'.¹⁰ Cut thin and put between buttered bread slices or rolls it makes a good sandwich for a Bush Picnic or Beach picnic.¹¹ Mrs. J. Hayes, won First prize of \$10 for her Cabanossi Casserole.

¼ lb cabanossi sausage
3 medium potatoes
4 eggs
1 cup milk
10 carton sour cream

Put peeled potatoes in saucepan with salted water, bring to boil, reduce heat and cook until tender. Drain and slice. Boil eggs approx. 10 minutes. Shell and slice. Combine milk and sour cream. Slice sausages. Arrange layers of potatoes, sour cream, eggs and sausages in greased casserole, finish with a layer of potatoes and sour cream. Bake in moderate oven 30 minutes. Serves 4.¹²

Jatz biscuits

Arnott's launched Jatz in 1952. An ad in December 1952 displays three cracker style biscuits from Arnott's: the square Sao, the oblong Thin Captains (A popular table water biscuit) and the round Jatz (The all-family, all-purpose biscuit) the caption reading 'A variety to satisfy your needs.'¹³

Jatz was competing with three other round biscuits: the Savoy Cracker the earliest entry into the market in 1938; Clix; and Ritz.¹⁴ Just why Jatz became the favourite is not clear. Perhaps it was the malty, salty flavour. Perhaps it was because it was a part of the trio, and it was convenient to buy the same brand. Perhaps its sales pitch 'all-family, all-purpose' struck a chord. Perhaps it was Arnott's overall sales pitch: There is no Substitute for Quality. Perhaps it was the economy pitch for Jatz –100 to the pound.¹⁵

It soon gained a reputation as a biscuit for dips. In 1959 Arnott's took out a full-page ad in the *Australian Women's Weekly* suggesting that the reader's next party should be a Jatz Dips Party. It gave recipes for 3 dips: Cucumber Dip; Asparagus Dip; and a 5 O'clock dip: and 5 O'clock Dip:

⁹ 'Cabanossi' www.meatsandsausages.com

¹⁰ 'Cabanossi' Dictionary of Sausage Types to Help You Make the Right Selection, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 10 March 1965 p.44

¹¹ Picnics, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 11 January 1967 p.11

¹² Prize Recipes, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 22 November 1972 p.76

¹³ 'A variety to satisfy your needs,' *The Sydney Morning Herald* 16 December 1951 p.3

¹⁴ 1938 Brockhoff launches Savoy Crackers, Australian Food Time Line

¹⁵ *The Sun* 26 March 1953 p.w6

To one 1 ½ lb. package Cream Cheese add 2 tablespoons cream, 1 tablespoon meat sauce, ½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce, ½ teaspoon lemon juice, and ¾ teaspoon seasoned salt. Mix until well blended. Serve with Jatz biscuits.¹⁶

Equally it gained a reputation for being a good platform for canapes and spreads.

1 lb. small prawns (shelled)
Arnott's Plaza or Jatz Biscuits
½ lemon (optional)
6 tablespoons mayonnaise
A teaspoon salt
Dash pepper
1 oz grated sharp cheese
Paprika

Method

Chop the prawns, squeeze a little lemon juice over them if desired. Add mayonnaise, salt and pepper. Mix well. Spread 1 teaspoon of mixture on each Plaza or Jatz biscuit, sprinkle with grated cheese and paprika. Place under griller until cheese melts and browns lightly. Serve immediately. Makes about 30 canapes.¹⁷

In 1961 Arnott's advertised its new line:

Delight your guests and your family by serving Arnott's Cheese Jatz – the crisp, new, tender cracker biscuits with a flavour of fine cheese - about 120 biscuits to the pound.¹⁸

Cheese

Before cheese Jatz there was cheese *and* Jatz

I have been a member of a community theatre group for nearly 40 years. For many years we performed in a hall and patrons sat at able, cabaret style. We used to provide plates of cube cheese, cabanossi, and Jatz (and really awful cask wine). Our supper lady insisted on referring to it as cheese and cabanoski; many of the group's old-timers still refer to it as cabanoski – much to the bemusement of newer members.¹⁹

I admit I cannot recall what the cheese was I used. Giving it the benefit of doubt I'm going to say it was block Cheddar. Cheddar was certainly being sold by 1891 when this recipe for Cheese Straws was published:

Cheese Straws

Mix 2 oz of grated Parmesan cheese, 2 oz of butter, 2 oz flour, 1 oz Cheddar cheese, and the yolk of an egg to a stiff paste. Flavour the mixture with cayenne, salt, and a very little pounded mace. Roll this out rather thinly, cut it into fingers about 6 inches long and half an inch wide, bake them

¹⁶ Arnott's Famous Jatz Biscuit, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 29 April 1939 p.72

¹⁷ Great Recipe Ideas with Arnott's Famous Biscuits *Australian Women's Weekly* 21 April 1971 p.31

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for a few minutes in a quick oven, and serve cold. They should be piled in a dish in traverse rows.²⁰

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My hopes of finding when cabanossi, cheese and Jatz get together first have been dashed. Still, I know where to get a hit when I want one. And of course, I can be a retro host and serve it up at my next party. Or indeed I can go all the way and tweak that 1951 Jatz Dips Party adding cabanossi and cheese.

PS. It's 18 May 2024. I walk into a 7/11 to pick up some milk and I find cabanossi now coming in a handy bite size.



²⁰ 'Cheese Straws' Recipes, *Western Mail* 3 January 1891 p.23